

## **Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)**

### **Basic Instrument**

Article VI-1 of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Constitution. [Resolution](#) 4/61 of the FAO Council at its Sixty-first Session in November 1973. Statutes amended by FAO Council in December 1978.

### **Implementing Legislation**

None

### **Member Nations**

Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, France, European Community, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Japan, Korea (Rep. of), Mexico, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Spain, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, United States, and Venezuela.

### **Commission Headquarters**

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### **U.S. Representation**

NOAA Fisheries Service leads delegations to WECAFC. The delegation usually consists of representatives of the Office of International Affairs and Seafood Inspection, Southeast Region, the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and the Department of State.

### **Description**

#### **A. Mission/Purpose:**

WECAFC's purpose is to facilitate the coordination of research; to encourage education and training; to assist Member Governments in establishing rational policies; and to promote the rational management of resources of interest to two or more countries. The Commission has an advisory management function but no regulatory powers.

#### **B. Organizational Structure:**

The Commission, composed of all Members, is the central policy forum. The Commission has four Subsidiary Committees: (1) Working Party on Assessment of Marine Fishery Resources; (2) Working Party on Fishery Economics and Planning; (3) Committee for the Development and Management of Fisheries in the Lesser Antilles; and (4) the Ad hoc working groups.

### **Recent Developments**

The 15th biennial meeting of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) was convened in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 26-28 March 2014. Although the status of many fisheries in the region warrants concern, there is clearly reason for optimism as evidenced by increased national and regional efforts for the management and conservation of some species, many coordinated by WECAFC. The meeting made significant

progress in adopting recommendations for countries to adopt seasonal closures for fishing for Nassau grouper, a species that is in serious decline. The group also recommended specific management measures for queen conch, a species whose international trade is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The two organizations collaborate on management of this species, one of the few instances in which environment and fisheries authorities have undertaken such cooperation. The recommendation will be forwarded to the CITES Secretariat for consideration. The meeting also adopted other proposals calling for member countries to collaborate to strengthen fisheries management in the region.

A workshop on implementing the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing was convened concurrent with the WECAFC meeting. The Agreement allows party States to refuse port entry or access to port services, including landing and transshipment of fish, to foreign-flagged vessels known to have engaged in IUU fishing. The WECAFC meeting adopted a resolution calling on member countries to become party to the FAO Agreement to collaborate in its implementation.

In the midst of these accomplishments ran a deep undercurrent of unease and even anger about illegal, unregulated unreported fishing in the Wider Caribbean. In answer to these concerns, WECAFC created a new working group to consider the problem.

A resolution on transformation of WECAFC into a binding regional fisheries management organization was not adopted, with a number of countries indicating that the decision was premature. The United States funded a series of workshops and meetings in 2008 to consider this question with the same decision. See Plans for future work, below, for more information.

#### **Recent accomplishments of WECAFC Working Groups:**

**Lobster WG:** The WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM/CFMC Working Group on Spiny Lobster met in Panama City, Panama, 21-23 October 2014 to begin a Caribbean-wide stock assessment for this species.

**Spawning Aggregations:** The First Meeting of THE CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Spawning Aggregations was convened in Miami, Florida, 29–31 October 2013, to make recommendations for cooperative actions of Parties in the Wider Caribbean Region.

**Queen Conch:** The 2nd meeting of the CFMC/WECAFC/OSPESCA/CRFM Working Group on Queen Conch was convened in Panama City, Panama, 18-20 November 2014 with funding from CITES, FAO and the Caribbean Fishery Management Council to develop recommendations, including guidelines for making CITES No-Detriment Findings and conversion factors, to lead to a region-wide management plan for the species.

#### **Plans for future WECAFC work:**

**WECAFC reform/reorientation process:** In addition to the on-going work of WECAFC, the organization will again consider how WECAFC might improve its work in the region and what form might be best in order to do this. The European Union offered to fund an independent cost/benefit assessment of the issue. A small working group will meet to review the document, followed by a larger meeting of all member governments meeting in November in Trinidad and Tobago to make recommendations to the full Commission meeting. Changes to the structure and responsibilities of WECAFC will be considered at the next meeting of the Commission in early 2016.

## **Staff Contacts**

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